Testimony Regarding SB 426
March 21, 2012

Tolland was one of the few towns to utilize GIS to map road closures and downed power lines. This was not something that we had planned or set up prior to the event. We had not had a town-wide emergency of this magnitude since adopting GIS (the Tropical Storm in August caused much less trouble in Tolland) and there had not been much thought about how we might utilize GIS to help manage the event. Even though our use of GIS was invented on the spur of the moment, the line workers that came into town were extremely appreciative of the maps that they were handed.

CL&P received quite a bit of criticism for their slow response to the storm and lack of communication. Some of this is legitimate, but many towns were not ready for an event of this magnitude either and communication goes both ways. Towns, being smaller and having a more intimate knowledge of the area of operations, were able to recover from the shock of the widespread damage more quickly, but how many towns communicated their intimate knowledge with the utilities? Tolland's minimal use of GIS had an impact on the line crews' ability to assess what work was necessary and which areas of town needed the most workers.

CL&P spent a lot of time "assessing the damage" before they even started to repair the damage. Town road crews were out moving around town soon after the snow stopped falling and the sun came up. These municipal employees could have accomplished quite a bit of CL&P's initial damage assessment. If the towns had some of CL&P's GIS layers, CL&P could have gotten mapped data, by pole number: where poles were broken, where transformers where damaged, where lines were down, where trees blocked the roads and would hinder repairs. In the same way, CL&P could have communicated back to the towns the location of their workers and where they would be working the next day.

All Utilities claim that their data is protected and that they can not release it for reasons of national security; if the data in their possession is protected then the same data in our possession is also protected. The towns are not looking for hidden infrastructure. We are looking for kind of data that we could collect ourselves; we can see utility poles on high resolution photography and we could visit each pole to record the number, record the location of transformers and the number and type of wire on each pole, but I expect that CL&P already has all of that. We are only asking them to provide us with the obvious, to save us the time to collect this data. The Towns and CL&P need to improve their communication and they all need to be talking the same language; sharing data could be as much to CL&P's benefit as it is to the towns'.

Stephen Lowrey
Town of Tolland
Zoning/Wetlands Agent and GIS Operator
Geospatial Information Systems Council representing towns of less than 30,000